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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4677
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0937
RUEHSL/AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA 0009
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9710
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN 0217
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4198
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1654
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3380
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0395
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6807
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4421
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0785
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0787
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0457
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2718
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0362
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000799

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: SPDC ROAD SHOW GOES TO KAREN STATE

REF: A. RANGOON 624

[1](#)B. RANGOON 591

[1](#)C. 05 RANGOON 614

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Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In another of its carefully choreographed road shows for local diplomats and hand-picked media, the Burmese ruling regime showcased its "peace and development" program in pacified areas of Karen State and characterized the Karen National Union as a "terrorist organization" solely responsible for the ongoing conflict and hardships in the rest of the state. Leaders of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army and other cease-fire groups to laud the wonderful treatment they receive from the regime. The regime's one-sided view of the situation in Karen State omitted some key facts and revealed how much it spends to buy the loyalty of former insurgents. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited diplomats to visit Karen State June 8-10 on one of the GOB's regularly scheduled "study tours" to highlight development projects and display insurgents who have returned to the "legal fold." Ambassadors from South Korea, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and most ASEAN countries participated, along with diplomats from U.S., U.K., Egyptian, and Saudi missions, and representatives of UNDP, UNICEF, and IOM. Minister of Information, Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan, met the diplomats at the border of Mon State and took control of the tour, stopping en route to show off some of the SPDC's trademark bridges and dams.

PEACE IN THE VALLEY

¶3. (C) The tour's purpose, Kyaw Hsan said, was to demonstrate that areas where Karen cease-fire groups live are peaceful and prospering, in contrast to areas controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU). The group visited the state capital of Hpa-an and Myainggyingu, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) headquarters on the Salween River, opposite the town of Kamamaung. Kyaw Hsan claimed that this region is home to 30,000 Karen who returned from KNU-controlled areas to farm and start small industries. DKBA leader Tha Htoo Kyaw, 60, a former Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldier, recited a litany of grievances against the KNU, mostly allegations of religious discrimination by Christian KNU leaders against Buddhist soldiers and their families before the DKBA/KNU split in 1994. Tha Htoo Kyaw also described the significant assistance the DKBA receives from the GOB, confirming that the GOB continues to provide free rice and development assistance for Karen who have settled in DKBA-controlled areas.

¶4. (U) In a carefully scripted question and answer period, Tha Htoo Kyaw denied that many DKBA soldiers rejoined the KNLA recently, saying the number was only "in double digits." He admitted that the DKBA had conducted arson attacks on refugee camps in Thailand in the past, but claimed this was not DKBA policy, but rather spontaneous acts by youthful soldiers who sought revenge for a KNU-linked assassination of a DKBA spiritual leader in the 1990s.

¶5. (C) The group also visited Phayagon "Peace Village," where former KNU Forestry Minister Pado Aung San lives. Pado Aung San told the visitors how he and his group of over 200 people "returned to the legal fold" with their weapons in 1998 in response to the GOB's "arms for peace" initiative. He said the GOB warmly welcomed his group when they arrived and provided land, vehicles, farming equipment, and supplies to raise pigs and chickens and to cultivate cash crops. He has

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already planted 3,000 rubber trees. Pado Aung San said he became disenchanted with the KNU because its leaders took funds earned through the teak trade to build mansions in Thailand and did little to improve the welfare of the Karen people.

THE REST OF THE STORY

¶6. (C) Pado Aung San failed to mention was that when he escaped from the KNU, he coerced over 100 Karen students and teachers from a Christian school to return with him as human shields. He also did not mention that he also bought a lavish home in Bangkok with logging profits, and that he fled to Burma when the KNU learned the extent of his embezzlement. The KNU says it sold Pado Aung San's Bangkok mansion in 2005 to pay for General Bo Mya's medical expenses following his stroke (ref C).

¶7. (C) Another GOB returnee, Saw Tha Moo He, was a former KNU regiment commander who defected in 1997 with over 200 weapons and nearly 500 people in tow. He first settled down too close to KNU-controlled territory and several of his family members were killed in KNU retaliatory attacks. He recounted his personal losses and added that, with GOB assistance, his group now lives comfortably and their children have access to good education. He said that in addition to receiving land and agricultural assistance, the GOB pays him an allowance of nearly \$750 per month. He swore his allegiance to the SPDC, saying he is "so happy now and will cooperate with the GOB forever."

¶8. (U) Tha Htoo Kyaw, Pado Aung San, and Saw Tha Moo He are all Karen members of the National Convention. Pado Aung San said he believes the SPDC's seven-step road map is the only way to achieve national reconciliation.

BLAME THE EXILES

¶9. (U) In Hpa-an, Information Minister Kyaw Hsan delivered a keynote speech that contrasted the peace and development of southern Karen State with the ongoing instability in northern Karen State (ref A). He placed all blame on KNU aggression for forcing the GOB to undertake "necessary security measures and cleaning work" in that region. He repeatedly accused "Western masters and their lackey terrorists" of displacing Karen villagers and provoking refugee flows. He claimed that the KNU has only 3,5000 members, only one-tenth of one percent of all Karen people in Burma, so it has no right to speak for Burma's Karen population of 3.5 million. Earlier in the day, DKBA leader Tha Htoo Kyaw had estimated KNU strength at "less than 10,000 troops," and our Karen sources claim the Karen population in Burma is 5-7 million.

¶10. (C) Kyaw Hsan recited a list of KNU atrocities from the 1940s and 1950s, and claimed that the Shan Women's Action Network's 2002 report "License to Rape" falsely accused Burmese soldiers of acts perpetrated solely by members of the KNU. He alleged that the SPDC and KNU were close to reaching a peace agreement two years ago until "Western nations" intervened because they did not want Burma to be peaceful. He repeatedly referred to "so called refugee camps" in Thailand to call their legitimacy into doubt. He also denounced an announcement by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) to use satellite imaging to reveal potential human rights abuses in Burma. Kyaw San claimed the AAAS, "in collusion with" the U.S. Campaign for Burma, would try to fabricate photos of alleged army abuses, suggesting that the KNU would fool the cameras by staging village burnings and other human rights abuses.

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POTEMKIN UNIVERSITY

¶11. (C) SPDC Secretary-1 Lieutenant General Thein Sein joined the road show briefly to open a new regime-run computer college in Hpa-an. A ceremonial highlight at the college was ten students busily surfing the Internet, but emboff noticed they were all viewing the college website. A teacher later revealed that the computer college has no Internet access at any time, only to the school's local area network.

¶12. (C) At each stop of the tour, presenters contrasted pre-1988 and post-1988 development indicators. They referred to the post-1988 era as "the period of the Tatmadaw (Burmese Army) Government," in contrast with the lack of development under former military dictator Ne Win. Kyaw Hsan reached even further into the past when listing KNU atrocities, drawing almost every example from the 1950s and 1960s, before the KNU became a more unified and disciplined force under General Bo Mya. Despite efforts to blame current conditions solely on the KNU, the regime was unable to produce current examples of abuse.

¶13. (C) COMMENT: The regime's investments in a computer college, a technical school, and a small university in Hpa-an, indicate it feels confident that southern Karen State is secure from KNU advances. Several cease-fire groups have settled in the region, but the regime spends significant sums to prop them up and maintain their loyalty. These groups are willing to continue to sing the SPDC song to remain on the dole, while the regime uses them to assert that its national reconciliation plan is viable. By characterizing the KNU and the refugees as one and the same, the GOB also seeks to minimize concern for the fate of thousands of IDPs and refugees resulting from its ongoing military actions in northern parts of Karen State. END COMMENT.
STOLTZ